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ABSTRACT

The two articles in this document describe Swedish child centers (day nurseries, nursery schools, and after school centers). In one article, a government official discusses the overall aims of the child centers, their facilities and use, and the standards and staff. The role of national and local governments in administration and finances is outlined and the need for expansion of preschool facilities in Sweden is stressed. The second article, written by a journalist, is a critique of Swedish child centers from the parent's point of view. The need for additional and better centers to reach wider and more diverse groups of children is emphasized. Physical planning, age grouping, teachers, and length of the center day are discussed. (NH)

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Before School Starts

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For Children's Minds – Not Just to Mind the Children

by SIV THORSELL

For their personal development, children need the stimulating contacts and outside impulses offered by our child centres.

Should preschools (day-nurseries and nursery schools) look like the home, and function in the same way as the home? Obviously, they must offer children what is valuable in a good home environment; they must offer protection, food and warmth, security and human contact. That is to say they must satisfy certain fundamental physical, emotional and social needs. There are also certain things that modern homes are unable to provide to a sufficient degree; the children have limited opportunities of making contact with others, and it is often difficult to meet their need for intellectual stimulation. The home, the residential environment, is the result of many compromises in which the children's interests tend to suffer. Preschools can offer a children's environment in the true sense, thus becoming not only a sort of reserve home but also an amusing and stimulating "place of work".

Swedish preschools are classified as either day-nurseries or nursery schools. The day-nurseries look after children for five or more hours when parents are at work, while the nursery schools usually receive children in groups for three hours. After a long period of stagnation, the number of day-nurseries has begun to increase steadily. The need, however, is still far greater than the supply. Nursery schools have expanded considerably ever since the war and continue to outnumber the day-nurseries, but there are still relatively few of them. At present, roughly half of all Swedish children below school age can attend a nursery school or day-nursery for a year or more before starting school. As shown by Table 1, about 12 per cent of all children between the age of three and six were attending a day-nursery or nursery school in 1965.

In recent years, the Government has taken a number of measures to stimulate the provision of day-nurseries. The state grants available have been increased on two occasions, and the state now provides considerable sums towards the erection and maintenance of day-nurseries and free-time centres for school

Table 1. No. of 3 to 6-year-olds attending Swedish day-nurseries or nursery schools in 1965

Age	No. of children per cohort	No. of children in day-nurseries	%	No. of children in nursery schools	%	Total no. of children in day-nurseries and nursery schools	Total %
6-year-olds	104,743	2,156	2.1	39,085	37.3	41,244	39.4
5 „ „	102,219	2,156	2.1	10,423	10.2	12,579	12.3
4 „ „	104,501	1,790	1.7	2,450	2.3	4,240	4.1
3 „ „	107,284	1,790	1.7	156	0.14	1,946	1.8
Total	418,747	7,892		52,114		62,009	

Source: National Board of Education

children. As will be mentioned below, day-nurseries, nursery schools and free-time centres are jointly referred to as "child centres".

A Royal Commission has been formulating the aims of activities at nursery schools and day-nurseries. The Commission is also to propose a basic pedagogic programme for preschools. The next stage of its work will be to study the possible introduction of a compulsory, public preschool system, which will allow all children within a certain age range to attend part-time or full-time.

This account is mainly a description of the situation at present; the scope, activities, administration, financing, and staff of Swedish preschools. It concludes with an attempt to describe the possible scale and nature of activities in the future. There is strong support not only for an expansion of the day-nurseries, but also for a broadening of activities so as to guarantee every child the opportunity to attend a preschool. Actual activities at these schools are also the subject of lively discussion, and an attempt will be made to outline certain views that have been put forward.

Swedish preschools

Swedish preschools do not at present offer any direct preparation for the schools, and provide very little in the way of actual teaching. The term preschool, in this context, includes as mentioned both the full-time "day-nursery" and the part-time "nursery school".

In the *day-nurseries* the children of gainfully employed parents are looked

after. The children spend at least five hours a day at the nursery. Ages range between six months and seven years, but departments for the youngest children are not available at all nurseries. Nurseries accepting children under the age of two are concentrated mainly to the three main cities, as shown by the following table (2), which gives the age distribution of places available at day-nurseries in 1967 in Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, and in the rest of Sweden. The number of children who can be accepted, however, exceeds the official number of places, since a surplus intake of 20 per cent is allowed.

Table 2. No. of places in day-nurseries receiving state grants 30.6.1967, by age groups

	Official number of places					No. of children registered
	6 months—2 years	2 years	3—4 years	5—7 years	Total no. 6 months—7 years	
Stockholm	920	1,000	1,553	1,990	5,463	6,556
Göteborg (Gothenburg)	188	305	484	610	1,587	1,904
Malmö	166	186	336	404	1,092	1,310
Rest of Sweden	787	1,235	2,487	3,453	7,962	9,554
Total, whole of Sweden	2,061	2,726	4,860	6,457	16,104	19,324

Source: The National Board of Health and Welfare

How far have we succeeded in meeting the requirements of working parents for organized supervision and care of the type provided at day-nurseries? The following table (3) shows that other forms of supervision still dominate. The figures in the table are taken from a state report, which resulted in an investment in *family day-nurseries*[1]) as a complement to the regular nurseries. From January 1, 1969, such activities are subsidized by the state. It is generally believed that the family day-nurseries will help fill the gap for a reasonably short period, and that they will decline in importance as more regular day-nurseries are built. The emphasis on day-nurseries stems mainly from their being the

[1]) A family day-nursery (child-minding) is a private home where someone looks after the children of working parents during the day, or part of the day. In the case of older children, attendance at a nursery school can be supplemented by supervision in a family day-nursery.

Table 3. Supervision of children 0—10 years of age with gainfully employed parents

Form of supervision	No. of children 0—10 years of age	%	Of which under 7 No.	%
Day-nursery/free-time centre	16,615	5	13,274	9
Nursery school/half-day-nursery	2,395	..	2,395	2
Private family day-nursery	57,950	18	47,519	31
Local authority family day-nursery	8,802	3	6,983	5
Supervision in the home	159,159	50	79,580	52
Manage by themselves	62,003	20	3,100	2
Combination of above	10,700	3	535	..
Total	317,624	100	153,386	100

Source: Family Day-nursery Commission

safest and most reliable solution for both the children and their parents, providing the staff, premises, equipment, toys and pedagogic aids that will create the most stimulating environment, one which will promote the children's development socially, emotionally and intellectually.

Nursery schools, as I have said, are considerably more common than day-nurseries. In principle, they should cater to children between the ages of four and seven, but the majority of children attending nursery schools at present are six-year-olds, and access to nursery schools varies from district to district. The predominance of six-year-olds is caused by the short supply in relation to the demand. Only a few cities and municipalities provide preschools on sufficiently large a scale to allow acceptance of children from the age of five, permitting them to attend for two years.

As a rule, a nursery school or department of a nursery school will take a group of about twenty children in the morning, and another group of twenty in the afternoon. One nursery school teacher is usually responsible on her own for a nursery school or department of a nursery school within a child centre, as compared with two teachers for each day-nursery department. The individual child will spend about three hours a day at the nursery school, five days a week. These schools follow the regular division of the year into terms, which means that they do not function during the summer (for about three months), or around Christmas and the New Year.

Child centres is a term used jointly for day-nurseries, nursery schools and free-time centres and will be used frequently in this booklet. *Free-time centres,* which are to be found so far mainly in Stockholm, look after the younger school-

children during the part of the day when they are not at school. It is still more common for day-nurseries and nursery schools to be separate, but the institutions now being built often combine both forms of activity. In a few cases, free-time centres for schoolchildren have been combined with a day-nursery and/or nursery school.

From preschool to school

Swedish children start school in their seventh year but can receive special permission to start earlier. For a number of years, a "school-readiness test" has been given to all children before they start school. Previously, a child who was found insufficiently mature could be kept waiting for an additional year, during which he was permitted at best to attend a nursery school. The system now being introduced means abandoning the "school-readiness test" and also means that all normally gifted children should start school at the regular time. If necessary, children with difficulties should be taught in a special "school-readiness class" or receive special instruction while attending a normal class. Children, for instance, who have difficulties in learning to read can obtain assistance in a "remedial reading clinic". Instead of constructing the school in a given way and trying to fit all children to this pattern, attempts are now being made to create a school to fit the children, with a maximum of individualized teaching. The whole concept of "readiness for school" is being abandoned. It is not intended that children who have difficulty in keeping up should have to repeat a whole year; instead, assistance must be made available at the points where the child encounters particular difficulty.

Free-time centres for schoolchildren are considered to be of great value, especially for younger schoolchildren whose parents are working, since children during their first years at school attend for only a few hours a day. In the first grade children attend 19 hours a week, in the second 20 hours a week and in the third 25 hours a week.

Institutions for young children are not simply "parking places"—they must function also as pedagogic centres.

Many people hesitate to refer to day-nurseries and nursery schools as "institutions". An institution is regarded as something closed and isolated, which is the last thing we want our preschools to be. Unfortunately, in Sweden as elsewhere, the special facilities provided for young children are often "closed", in the same way as the majority of homes. Schools are also closed institutions. However, the new type of school is being made increasingly open to the outside world.

Community planning has not catered particularly to the needs of children. The new districts being built are for the most part purely residential areas, in

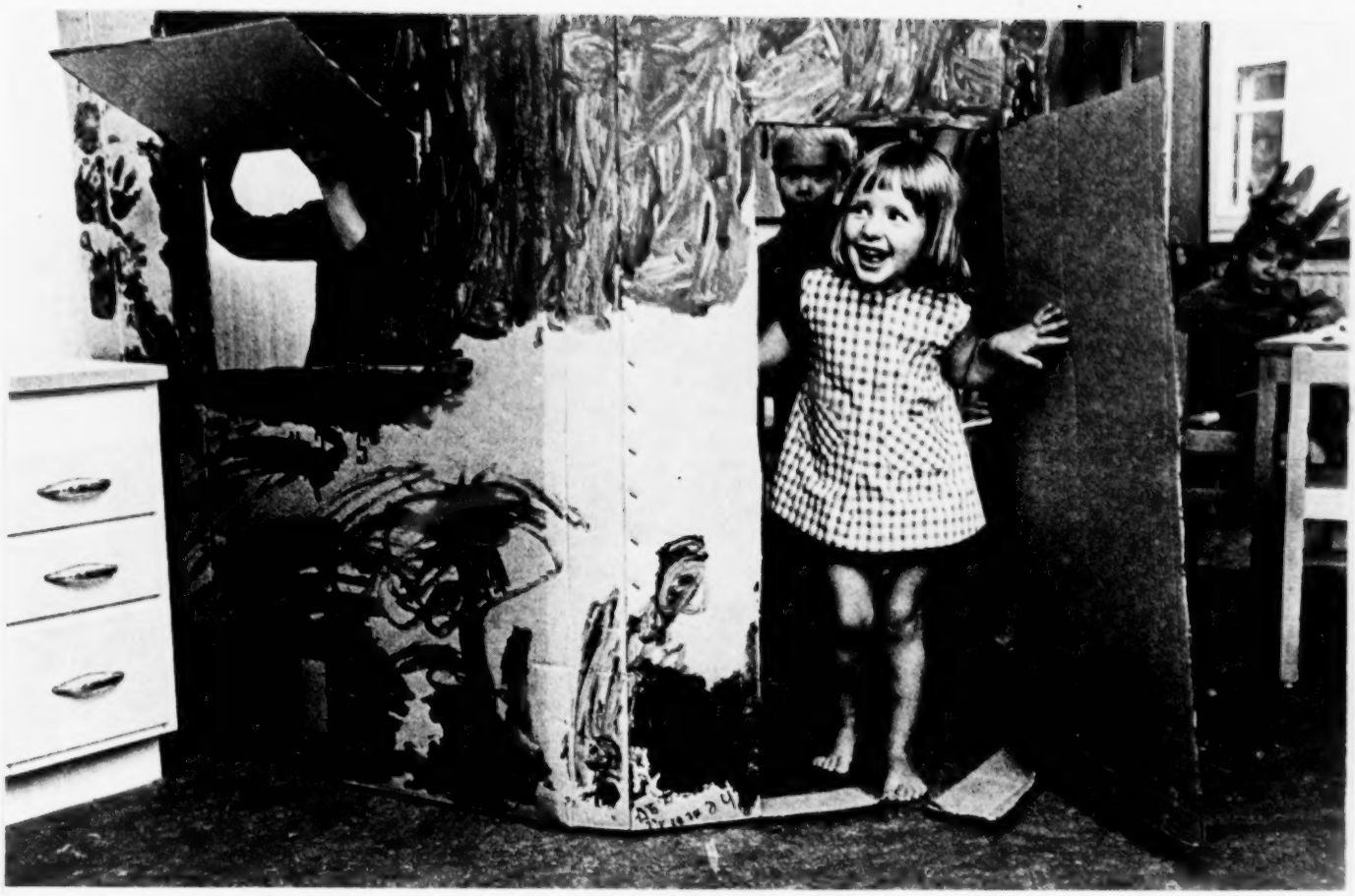
which very little goes on. The shops are placed in the big centres. Places of work of all kinds, such as offices and workshops, are concentrated in the centre of town or in special industrial areas. Many believe that a residential area should provide an everyday environment which is above all friendly to children, a place with playgrounds, recreation grounds and other places where children and adults can meet. An incipient interest in such aspects of our environment has shown us that the residential areas now in existence, and under construction, by no means meet requirements. It should be borne in mind here that Sweden, which enjoys a relatively large land area in relation to population, has experienced in recent decades a large-scale migration to the urban areas. Up to the mid-19th century Sweden was very much of an agrarian society. Not until the beginning of the 1930's did industry and services take the lead over agriculture. Today almost half the Swedish population is engaged in these sectors while the percentage occupied in agriculture and foresty has fallen to about 10 per cent.

Child centres (including free-time centres for schoolchildren), with the opportunities they offer for activities and contacts with the outside world, have an important function to fulfil. The requirements thus far made of the physical plant have related to such elementary and of course very important aspects as spaciousness, a situation at ground level, satisfactory daylight lighting, adequate sanitation, and sensible planning.

General regulations of this type have been published by the National Board of Health and Welfare, the ultimate supervisory authority in this field. The Board has also specified in detail how premises should be arranged. It is stipulated, for instance, that there should be an indoor play surface of at least 32 sq. ft. per child — preferably more. The outside surface available should be about 160—110 sq. ft. per child—preferably more. The minimum total play surface of the nursery schools is 110 sq. ft.

The Board recommends that child centres should be housed in separate buildings, particularly in the case of day-nurseries. A child centre can also be arranged on the ground floor of a larger building, provided that an outdoor playground can be made available directly adjoining the centre. Sample drawings for the use of local authorities and others have been published by the Board, which has also approved a number of "type solutions" submitted by the manufacturers of prefabricated buildings. Many of the child centres now being built are housed in free-standing prefabricated premises of this kind. It is not unusual, however, to use existing detached residences.

It is also emphasized that child centres should be as flexible as possible, so that they can be used if necessary for other purposes than originally intended. This is because requirements in residential areas shift so rapidly; in new areas there is a great need of premises for preschool children, but in a few years the



Children at a day-nursery in Stockholm has built a "post-office" of their own. It is being increasingly accepted that children who spend many hours in a collective must have the room and opportunity to build dens and withdraw into quiet corners.

"Small nurseries" are a new alternative being tried for those children who cannot get a place at a day-nursery run by trained staff. A small group of children of different ages are looked after on hired premises or in the home by an ordinary mother, who is given a 60-hour course in child care and psychology.

emphasis can be on facilities for schoolchildren. It must then be easy to adapt premises so that they can be used for older children.

The Board's recommendations also stress that the preschool premises should be homelike. The nursery schools are a supplement to the play environment of the home, while the day-nurseries and free-time centres also are a substitute for care in the home. The preschools (and even free-time centres) must thus be able to function as homes, but also offer something more than this. This brings us to the actual aims of the preschools, and how they are to be realized.

Present aims of the preschool

According to the Board's recommendations, preschools are to provide a complement to upbringing in the home, at the same time offering children contacts with other environments and preparing them for the demands of school life. It is emphasized that the preschools should work in close contact with the home.

The day-nurseries, and the free-time centres, are a necessary condition for many mothers to take employment. The Board's recommendations further state that the nursery schools "can also give housewives the time off from their children that they need to organize their housework in a practical manner". It should perhaps be added that the Board has neglected to stress that housewives also need time off, not only for housework but also for their own sake—to be able simply to relax, to study, meet their friends, etc.

The purpose of upbringing is to promote the development of children's personalities and their social adjustment, and in this respect both the nursery schools and day-nurseries are to function as a complement to the family. Their pedagogic programme is entirely identical. What the day-nurseries offer in addition is daily care, meals and rest, and a longer period of play outdoors.

The Board's pedagogic recommendations emphasize particularly the role of the preschools in promoting independence and social adjustment. The children learn to function together in a group. According to the Board it is important also "that the children should jointly obtain certain basic knowledge of conditions outside the home, for instance by excursions or field trips. Such experiences can be pedagogically exploited in group work or free creative work of different kinds".

Activities

The Board's recommendations give great emphasis to staff and premises, but no detailed recommendations are made on how aims should be achieved. The description given in the recommendations expresses rather the actual practice that has developed under various influences, including the Fröbel system, the Vienna

school and to some slight extent also Montessori. (Only a few schools in Sweden adhere strictly to the Montessori system.)

The emphasis is on children making their own discoveries, with as little direct guidance as possible from the teacher. Activities are thus dominated by free play and free creative work, painting, woodwork, roleplay, etc. An example for more controlled activity is the "meeting times" arranged at most of the ordinary preschools; the nature of these can differ widely, depending on the teacher, the children, and the interplay between them. For the older preschool children there is a system of "centres of interest", a form of organized group work in a particular field. This type of activity is an attempt to introduce an element of learning, and at the same time to train children in more goal-directed group cooperation.

Otherwise, we can say that Swedish preschools put relatively little emphasis on structured learning—other than spontaneous learning—and that the primary concern is to promote more generally the children's emotional, social, intellectual and physical development.

Staff

Day-nurseries are staffed by nursery school teachers, children's nurses and—in some cases—instructors in child care. (Apart, of course, from staff not directly concerned with the children.) The number of children per staff member varies between age groups. The principle is that there should be fewer children to a department, the younger they are. The Board's standards for division into departments by ages, and the size of these departments, are shown by the following table.

Child centre	Age of children	Max. no. of children per department
Day-nursery	from 6 months to 1 year	(4+6) 10
	2 years	8
	3 and 4 years	12
	5 and 6 years	15
Nursery school	3 and 4 years	15
	5 and 6 years	20

In day-nurseries, two nursery school teachers should be attached to each department, in addition to the principal. If nursery school teachers are unobtainable, qualified children's nurses can be employed. Apart from kitchen staff and simi-

lar help, there should be one staff member to every five children. If the day-nursery has a department for babies (6—24 months), which is where the nurses normally work, then the personnel requirement is one staff member to every four children.

In a nursery school with one department in the morning and another in the afternoon, activities are the responsibility of only one nursery school teacher.

At a large number of child centres there are also trainees who require practical experience for admission to a nursery school teachers' training-college as part of their course. Such trainees, however, cannot be counted as staff for the purpose of meeting the Board's requirements.

Further assistance at the child centres is provided by *child visitors*, who also look after, in the home, sick children whose parents are at work. Such child visitors are employed by the local authority, but not directly attached to any child centre. Their services are provided via municipal "domestic aid committees". This form of service is not yet offered on any major scale.

Nursery school teachers undergo two years of training at state nursery school teachers' training-colleges. Entrance requirements are the nine-year compulsory school and certain practical experience as school trainees. At present there are 14 nursery school teachers' training-colleges in different parts of Sweden.

The training of children's nurses (nursery nurses) can comprise either a one-term course in the care of small children, plus practical experience among younger preschool children, or a thirty-four week course covering the care of both babies and small children.

Instructors in child care, who are qualified to become the principals of homes for babies or of day-nurseries with special departments for babies, undergo special training lasting for three years. Requirements for admission to such training include the nine-year compulsory school, domestic science school, and training as a children's nurse.

Administration and finances

Preschools (both day-nurseries and nursery schools) are under the supervision of the National Board of Health and Welfare, which is under the Ministry for Health and Welfare. The regional authority is the county administration and the local authority is the municipality.

A number of large municipalities, which run preschools on a large scale, employ consultants or inspectors who are responsible for coordinating the activities of day-nurseries, nursery schools, free-time centres, and child-minding, including the training and administration of assisting staff. In Stockholm the mental health organization also has a preschool team to assist staff in the field of mental health.

A preschool can be under the jurisdiction of the local authority, an association, a company, or a private association or person. As shown by the following table, most day-nurseries are under the jurisdiction of the local authority. Nursery schools too are usually under the local authority, but quite a few are run by associations, in most cases with the help of local authority grants. Anyone setting up a child centre can obtain a state "starting grant" and cover most other initial costs by a state loan.

Table 4. No. of day-nurseries receiving state grants 30.6.1967, by governing body (1)

	County Council or Medical Services Board	Municipality	Association	Company	Total
Stockholm	4 (4)	115 (99)	30 (24)	1 (1)	150 (128)
Göteborg (Gothenburg)	—	44 (37)	5 (3)	—	49 (40)
Malmö	—	23 (23)	2 (2)	—	25 (25)
Rest of Sweden	21 (21)	250 (214)	7 (7)	3 (2)	281 (244)
Total, whole of Sweden	25 (25)	432 (373)	44 (36)	4 (3)	505 (437)

(1) Figures include day-nurseries combined with free-time centres.
Figures in brackets give the number of institutions functioning only as day-nurseries.
Source: The National Board of Health and Welfare

Starting grants are available for premises arranged so that they can be used for the supervision of children throughout the day, or for at least five hours a day. The creation of day-nurseries and free-time centres is thus subsidized by the state, and the same is true of institutions functioning as both day-nurseries (and/or free-time centres) and nursery schools. Generally speaking, child centre premises attract both a grant and a loan, if the disposition and fixtures of the building are planned for group activities by children, and all the children accepted can stay there for a minimum of five hours a day. Those setting up a child centre must also undertake to make all places available for activities lasting for at least five hours per child per day. This means that the institution must offer cooked food and facilities for rest and sleep. If these conditions are met, nursery school departments are also eligible for grants and loans.

Child centre premises should be planned in consultation with the Board of Health and Welfare; it also determines the number of places, which must always be set in a given relationship to the space available and its disposition.

Grants towards the establishment of nursery schools can be applied for from

the State Inheritance Fund. If the nursery school is in a residential area eligible for state loans, then a state housing loan can be obtained.

In the case of state grants towards running expenses the requirement, again, is that activities cover at least five hours per child per day. It is also assumed that they will be under the supervision of qualified staff, and that the premises will be suitably equipped. If a given institution, for instance, has both day-nursery and nursery school departments, then a grant for current operations will be paid on the basis of all places, provided that at least two-thirds are utilized for supervision the whole day, or for at least five hours a day. State grants have been structured in this way because the state is concerned primarily with providing help to gainfully employed parents.

New developments

The state's opportunity to influence the building of day-nurseries lies in the generous provision of grants for erection and maintenance. Both grants and loans have been offered on a greatly increased scale during the sixties, and have contributed immensely to the accelerated rate of expansion.

A driving force has been the "Central Committee for Cooperation" appointed in 1963. It consists, among others, of representatives from the Board of Health and Welfare, the Labour Market Board, the Board of Education, the Association of Swedish Local Authorities, the Swedish Employers' Confederation and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. This committee is actively concerned with studies and information. Information, which is aimed directly at the local authorities, relates to population changes, employment, female participation in the labour market, and the technical, economic and organizational factors involved in the planning and building of day-nurseries and free-time centres. In 1964, a scheme was initiated to create County Committees for day-nurseries and free-time centres. These latter, which are now in operation in several counties, promote the growth of child centres within their respective areas.

Child centres and service to promote equality between the sexes

Underlying the strong increase in the number of day-nurseries is the intensive discussion being waged about equality between the sexes. This discussion has brought out latent needs that have long existed. Those women with young children who want and need to take gainful employment must have a real opportunity to do so, and it is realized that the best long-term solution is the provision of day-nurseries and free-time centres.

At the same time, it has been emphasized how one-sided it is to assign

Big wooden toys are a Swedish speciality, and the majority of Swedish day-nurseries are well supplied with things to play with. Arne (2½) reads a story for Stefan and Helena (3) in bed.

Water games are important, and it is becoming increasingly rare for Swedish day-nurseries to be built without the necessary facilities. Unfortunately they are not so common in departments for the smallest children, who have the greatest need to play with sand and water.

responsibility for the care and upbringing of children primarily to women, and hardly at all to men. Progressive opinion aims at a more even distribution of responsibility and rights between men and women in respect of work in the home, and participation in the life of the community at large. Day-nurseries, free-time centres, and rational personal and family services, are an important aid in solving this problem. However, the parents of small children must also be offered generous terms in respect of leaves of absence and shorter working hours, without this leading to discrimination in respect of their future careers and current and future social benefits (unemployment benefits, pensions, sickness benefits, etc.). It has been made clear that, inevitably, "having children costs money"—but that it should not necessarily be a burden to the parents for the whole of their life as it generally is at present, at least for the women. Mothers are now asked to sacrifice their personal and financial independence, possibilities of advancement, improved earnings, interesting jobs, civic duties, etc., simply because tradition has assigned them practically total responsibility for children and housework. Stockholm, which has a relatively high number of day-nurseries, was the first town to set a definite target for expansion, namely that at least 80 per cent of the children of working parents should have access to a day-nursery. This target has already been reached in some districts.

The same standard is recommended by the Central Committee for Cooperation. The realization of such a target would mean about 80,000 day-nursery places in Sweden, as compared with the 16,000 or so in existence. According to forecasts of future participation rates on the labour market, over 100,000 places in day-nurseries must be available by 1975 if the 50 per cent rule is to be fulfilled. About 2,700 new places have been created in the past year (1967/1968). Even if growth continues to accelerate slightly, it is hardly probable that the Committee's recommendations can be realized.

A common preschool system in the future

For those children who cannot obtain places — whether both or only one parent is at work during the day — the question can arise of making it possible, on a much larger scale, for a child to attend preschool for part of the day over several years. The Swedish Central Organization of Salaried Employees has demanded such a reform. It wants to make it compulsory for all local authorities—with strong support from the state—to offer all children the possibility of attending preschool for at least two years. As already mentioned, this question is now being considered by a Royal Commission. The directive given to this Royal Commission emphasizes that the aim of educational planning in recent years has been to offer a good school education regardless of the district of residence, financial status of the parents, and other circumstances. It

is stressed that this process of democratization should be broadened to cover circumstances influencing the initial position of the child on starting school.

This will make great demands on the preschool system, and probably require some change in its aims and the structure of its activities. This, however, is something that the Commission must first consider. Even if the question does not arise of making a fixed curriculum, the Commission's directive suggests that there is reason to compile more concrete recommendations on the nature and structure of activities. Studies made on the effect of attending a preschool suggest that it is often relatively slight in the case of children from families that are well-off and themselves make an effort to promote the child's development, i.e. largely families with a good education. In the case, however, of children from less adequate environments, the effect of preschool attendance is marked. It is striking how the consequences of these findings have been ignored. To begin with, it is obvious that children from different environments get a very different start in life—a situation that could be improved by a real investment in preschools. Secondly, these studies suggest that children generally have a development potential that is not exploited either by the homes or by our present type of preschools. It can be suspected that the adults determining the conditions under which our children grow up—by virtue of their position as parents, teachers, or public officials—do not really know what is best for the children. In many countries, the preschool is a more conservative institution than the school. This is natural enough, since the younger the child, the greater the degree of control that adults can exercise. Also, preschools in Sweden—and in other countries—are not subject to the same reformatory zeal and interest on the part of informed opinion. Nor does the legislation provide for the same supervision as in the case of schools. However, the view that children need *both the preschool and the home* is now gaining acceptance in Sweden. It is unreasonable to demand that the parents should meet all the child's needs, still less that the mother should accept responsibility for the child's upbringing to the extent she does now. This responsibility must be shared by *both* parents, *both of whom* need outside support.

The Child Centre – as Seen by a Parent

by MARIANNE KÄRRE

In the eyes of certain demanding parents, the Swedish child centre is still far from what it ought to be and perhaps from what it will be—even when the importance of the formative early years begins to be realized in our educationally progressive but psychologically retarded land.

Quantitatively speaking, it is inadequate. We have far too few child centres for the intellectually handicapped, who do not enjoy an equal chance with their more fortunate fellows when compulsory school starts. These can be children from culturally deprived environments, children whose development has been disrupted, or immigrant children from linguistically isolated homes lacking in contacts, or children whose physical handicaps have prevented normal relationships with others. They can also be "ordinary" children, who have been emotionally disrupted by continual, wearing friction with a frustrated mother who is incapable of meeting the child's need for stimulation and outside contacts. (We have few children per family in Sweden; the average is 1.7 children under sixteen per woman of fertile age. Half of all Swedish families with children have only one child.)

Swedish child centres are also qualitatively imperfect. This in spite of the fact that we have a greater staff of well-trained preschool teachers every year, and are one of the few countries where supervision and pedagogics have been officially accorded equal importance. The latter means that all those publicly employed to look after children should, in principle, have some form of pedagogic training, plus practical experience of child care in a family or institution. This is not required of preschool teachers outside the Scandinavian countries. Such practical details as giving these small children food, keeping them clean, putting them to bed, helping them to go to the toilet, all these things—in theory—are to be handled by pedagogically trained staff. In practice, this is not yet possible. Children under five years attending a day-nursery are usually looked after by children's nurses who have had only a short period of training and have no great pedagogic insight. Materially speaking, the children are very

well looked after. Almost too well, with the strict requirements in respect of hygiene and set routines traditionally made by children's doctors and counsellors, requirements which still set their stamp on activities.

Intellectually and emotionally, a great deal more could be done, particularly for the youngest children (whom many believe should not be collectively supervised until at least nine months) and those of 2—3 years. The younger girls now training to become preschool teachers have in fact begun to show an active interest in these age-groups, while their older colleagues have so far concentrated their interest and knowledge on 5 to 6-year-olds. Many young teachers are beginning to interest themselves also in handicapped and retarded preschool children, and are seeking special further training for this purpose.

Praiseworthy attempts have been made to reduce the difference in pedagogic standards between the day-nurseries and the previously more advanced nursery schools. However, a number of local authorities have not yet understood the need to staff day-nurseries with people who can give children more than physically adequate care. They still have an entirely out-of-date view of the day-nursery as a sort of social assistance.

The intensified programme for the building of day-nurseries in recent years has been dictated largely by the requirements of the labour market in respect of "supervision" for the children of working parents. The idea that day-nurseries and nursery schools are needed for the sake of the children themselves, for their development, has begun to gain acceptance only recently—although it has been held by preschool teachers themselves for more than half a century.

A smaller group, but an isolated one

Foreign preschool teachers visiting Sweden often envy their Swedish colleagues, who have groups of at most 20—22 children per teacher in nursery schools and even less in day-nurseries, while they themselves often have to cope with classes of 40 or 50. But the Swedish preschool teacher in a nursery school usually works all alone, the sole adult on the premises. She handles two groups a day, for three hours in the morning and for three hours in the afternoon. Apart from the children, she has to look after records, materials, purchasing, contact parents and authorities, etc.

She also receives very little personal support from outside, compared for instance with her French colleague, who will more frequently be working side by side with other adults and who will receive more frequent visits from inspectors and superior officers who can help her with pedagogic or psychological problems. To date it has also been very difficult for her to obtain assistance with her personal in-service training. Only recently has her isolation, par-

In pedagogically advanced preschools, the children can help the grown-ups "for real" in their everyday work, just as children and parents in modern Swedish homes democratically divide up the work between them, in the absence of domestic help.

The centralized catering systems used in many new large day-nurseries mean that the children are forbidden to the highly mechanical kitchens. But in an old, converted house like this, the children can help in the work of the adults.

ticularly in the rural districts, been realized, and courses and contact meetings arranged. A number of local authorities, however, still fail to understand that a preschool teacher, like other teachers, needs in-service training and the stimulus of new pedagogic ideas. Also, the state has neglected this important detail in our rapidly changing society. Only last year (1968) the preschool teachers' request for an annual state in-service training grant was rejected, while that of other teachers was approved.

Day-nurseries with several departments and a large staff often encounter great problems in staff cooperation, and this can reflect on the well-being of the children. Attempts to solve such problems with psychological expertise have so far been on a fairly modest scale, but are now being developed.

Posh but cramped

Preschool teachers from other countries also tend to envy the many newly built, materially superior institutions that are now prefabricated throughout Sweden. But if you have seen a lot of these shiny new child centres in the course of your work, as I have, then you are less impressed with them and notice rather that an excessively "posh" and ready-made environment, a child centre shaped too much in detail by central authorities, tends to hamper the development of new pedagogic ideas, and new, unforeseen activities. The new child centres have been built according to a detailed standard pattern, with a few variations; this means that they not only look alike in most cases, but also function in much the same way. Very little space has so far been given for independent local initiative or experiment within the framework of the state grants. The Board of Health and Welfare has reserved the right to approve each drawing, so that certain minimum requirements can be guaranteed. Beyond these the Board has also given precise advice and recommendations, which the local authoritites have followed when they could afford it, and were unwilling to rely on the local experts.

Often the local authorities have been content to meet the minimum requirements. Particularly in Stockholm, they have cut down on space in order to be able to build more child centres at the same price. The limited space and the practical measures taken to facilitate the work of staff often hamper the children's freedom to play, train their independence, move about freely, and perform the spontaneous creative work with freely selected material that should characterize preschool pedagogics.

Our flattened outdoors

Outdoor playgrounds are often uninspired and unimaginative, in spite of the expensive materials used. Sweden is in itself an undulating, attractive land, full

of variety. But in modern built-up areas, rational methods of building are well on the way to peeling clean and flattening out the terrain. Where there were once trees that could have been fun for children to climb in, where there were bushes, mounds, and stone pits around the planned "dens", the excavators have flattened everything out to provide a foundation for the prefabricated single-storey buildings, which need level ground if they are to be put up as quickly and cheaply as possible.

It is now being realized that these flattened-out playgrounds with mechanical arrangements to climb on, swings, and excessively "ready-made" play facilities provide an uninspiring environment, which often invites destructive activities rather than constructive group play. In the general discussion on environments for children, we have begun to look for something like the English adventure playgrounds, the modern, imaginatively laid-out and equipped play landscapes to be found in Denmark, or our own natural woodlands.

The gap to the school

Another shortcoming in the physical planning of child centres is that they are often placed some distance away from other buildings so that the children can be "in peace"—or is it the adults in the residential areas who want peace?

A new generation of parents is beginning to demand that small children, in order to acquire the necessary contacts with the adult life of the community, should instead spend their time in the centre of things, near to the schools, the library, recreation centres, places of work, shops, etc. This would also make it more generally possible for the children to use teaching materials from the schools and libraries. This they already do in Luleå, for instance, in the north of Sweden; here, the town authority has been trying for several years to bridge the physical gap that exists elsewhere between the preschool and compulsory school, parallel with the pedagogic gap.

As regards the content of preschool activities, we are still in the experimental stage. The emphasis has been on providing emotional security, by offering the children ample opportunity to develop their senses in play. In this, we have come further than many other countries. However, we are now beginning to realize how much more can be done to stimulate the children's intellect, imagination and emotional life, to increase their understanding of others, and of the world around them, and to give them an opportunity of activity identification with adults. A great deal remains to be done before the children at all preschools are trained in communicating with others by means of words, rhythmics, music, dramatic games, etc. We have only just begun to work on the sort of pedagogic dramatic activities so long practised in England, or to aspire to the intellectual training, the international insights, given to preschool children

in France. So far we have made only rudimentary attempts to enrich the experience of our children by puppet theatre as in Czechoslovakia, by television programmes as in Japan, by films and children's theatre as in the Soviet, by artistic work as in Poland. Nor have our attempts to let preschool children try audio-visual aids come very far, since the authorities providing grants do not consider this sort of material to be as necessary in the preschool as in compulsory school.

Division by ages

The strict division into different age-groups recommended by the Board of Health and Welfare is beginning to be seen as a serious obstacle to stimulating pedagogics. A group of ten or twelve 2 to 3-year-olds does not get much out of simply playing together. The youngest children also have a need to meet older children, and the 3 to 6-year-olds like to help looking after the younger ones; they themselves, in their turn, need contacts with schoolchildren, teenagers and other adults.

Only now are we beginning in Sweden to consider the reintroduction of a vertical age division in children's groups, as in the family. Here, as in England, we had favourable experience with such a division in our old country schools. Over 300 years ago, the Czech educationalist Comenius formulated the pedagogic truth that "it is not always the adult who shows the way".

No father figures

The absence of male supervisors and teachers is a shortcoming that Swedish child centres share with all other countries—with a few exceptions in Denmark. The consequences to small children of living exclusively in a female society has been demonstrated by, among others, the Canadian research scientist Nash in a survey of current psychological literature on the role of the father. Some recent Scandinavian studies (Tiller and Jonsson-Kälvesten) have confirmed that the absence of male objects of identification has negative effects on boys and girls alike. In spite of our newly acquired insight into this, no radical measures have yet been taken by the responsible authorities to bring male staff into the child centres, for instance by increasing the salaries and career opportunities for well-trained teachers.

The absence of males is particularly serious in so far as it is mostly the children of single parents, for the most part single mothers, who attend day-nurseries, children who have predominantly female contacts outside the nursery.

Too long at the day-nursery

Until such time as allowances for the care of children are greatly increased, single parents are obliged to take full-time jobs. As a result, many small children must spend a disproportionate number of hours per day in the collective environment of the day-nursery—in extreme cases 10—12 hours—while the parent is at work, and travelling to and from work. This means a wear and tear on both children and single parents that in the long run is intolerable in a socially progressive country. Nor, in the long run, can we get along without legislation which will permit the parents of small children to take paid leaves of absence, or to obtain an extra allowance to cover loss of pay, so that they can devote themselves more to the children, both in the day-nursery environment and at home.

As yet, the parents' opportunity to cooperate with the staff of the day-nursery in the everyday care of the child is very limited. Cooperation with the parents has simply not been considered and stimulated to a sufficient degree by the responsible authorities. The preschool staff have too little resources, too little money and time, too little training in adult psychology to be able to promote active participation by parents in the work of the day-nursery. The parents have failed to band together and exercise pressure to obtain legislation that would permit them to devote more time to the children in the early years.

The psychological expertise available to preschool staff with problem cases should also be many times greater than it is. Such activities, which have proved very useful, are now concentrated to Stockholm, but they are needed throughout the country. In a number of day-nurseries and nursery schools, which have too many mentally fragile children who have not stood up to the sudden transplantation into a large collective, the size of groups should be reduced or staff numbers increased. This sort of flexibility has not yet been possible in Sweden, where the central authorities tend to think in terms of standard patterns, and financial considerations. The need for a more individualized approach is only beginning to emerge.

Only for six-year-olds?

In spite of the criticisms that can be made of the Swedish nursery school in its present form, the majority of modern parents seem to want to retain it and develop it. Many people would like to see the nursery school expanded down to the three-year level, and view with some suspicion the proposed introduction of a compulsory nursery school for six-year-olds. Will this not mean that all the qualified preschool teachers are assigned to the six-year-olds? May there not be less chance then of achieving pedagogical stimulation in new, untested

Father figures are urgently needed in the entirely feminine world of the preschool. Male preschool teachers are beginning to appear in Sweden, now that a few courageous young men have found their way to the training colleges. So far, only one male trainee is in service at a department for babies.

A record player is now part of the standard equipment in the preschool, and the children can also bring records with them from home. Other audio-visual aids such as the radio, television, and tape recorders, which are beginning to be self-evident in junior schools, are not usually to be found in preschools.

Old "camp" articles are often lacking in our posh new preschools. Here the teacher has bought an old-fashioned cash register to stimulate the children to practice counting before school starts.

forms for the many younger children who risk being retarded in an emotionally or culturally deprived home environment.

Some people are also afraid that preschool teaching will become more rigid and structured, that the nursery school will be "adapted" to the school, instead of radical reforms being made in teaching in the early years of compulsory school and in the training of teachers for the junior level. The latter now learn very little about phases of child development prior to school age, and often employ teaching methods that are neither individualized nor suitable to the children's age. Nor does the physical planning of Swedish schools invite freer teaching methods, as do some of the modern "open-planned" English schools.

What is the aim of the preschool?

The discussion continues while we wait patiently, as is customary in Sweden, for yet another public commission to report that practice is still lying a good bit behind theory. Also, the actual aim of preschool activities has not yet been clearly formulated, or been the subject of general discussion.

What sort of people do we really want our preschools to turn out? What does it mean for a preschool child to "be adjusted to society?" To be adjusted to the extent that group loyalty extinguishes the ability to react individually and disassociate from the group when needed? To what society is the child to be adjusted? To today's society? To a Utopia of 2000 A.D.?

The current revolt of young people the world over shows that our present society and its ideals have not won the approval of the coming generation. But what do they or we who are parents of the next generation want instead? The only thing we know for certain is that the small individual being shaped today will be faced, as an adult, with greater demands for empathy, solution of conflict, flexibility and the suppression of egoistic motives in a shrunken, unfrontiered world of dwindling resources and growing needs. It would seem that we should draw the consequences of this fact in our present planning for the children.

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